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Pausch therapist to give talk, discuss new book

By Kellie B. Gormly
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The late Randy Pausch — author of "The Last Lecture" and a professor at Carnegie Mellon University — was an incredible man, who was "larger than life, as far as grace under fire," his therapist says. And he lived more fully in the last few months of his life than many people do in a lifetime.

Dr. Michele Reiss -- the psychotherapist who worked with Pausch and his wife, Jai, as they dealt with his mortal bout with pancreatic cancer -- will be giving a free presentation Monday about dealing with and healing from grief, using Pausch as a role model. Reiss will be discussing her new book, "Lessons in Loss and Living: Hope and Guidance for Confronting Serious Illness and Grief." The Pausches encouraged Reiss to write the book, she says, so that she could share with others the lessons they learned.

Reiss hopes attendees will feel inspired and comforted, for when they face unavoidable losses.

"Grief is a normal and inevitable part of life," she says. "At some point, we will all lose someone important to us.

"I'm hoping there will be ... some hope, and some laughs about how we all struggled," says Reiss, assistant program director and director of behavioral sciences for UPMC St. Margaret's Family Residency program. "It will be a reminder about, no matter where we are in life, even if you're grieving the loss of a loved one, it's still your life, and you deserve to live it well.

"I'm just real pleased to be able to do this," says Reiss, who also is an adjunct assistant professor for the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine and Graduate School of Nursing. "I have so many stories to tell, about so many amazing people."

Pausch died July 25, 2008, at the age of 47. His last lecture, delivered at Carnegie Mellon on Sept. 18, 2007, became an Internet sensation viewed by millions and an international media story. The best-selling book by the same title has been published in 35 languages.

In Reiss' book -- published in November 2010 by Hyperion Press -- the psychotherapist, who has a private practice in Aspinwall, speaks to people confronting a life-threatening illness and to those grieving the loss of a loved one.

"It certainly turned out to be a book ... of comfort and inspiration," she says. "It's simply a book about how to cope with diversity ... but it's also a book on how to live well.

"It also is a message to the rest of us to take time, every once in a while, to think about what's really important."

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